



Sustaining social harmony in diverse schools: A structural functionalist analysis of school climate using the AGIL framework

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how school climate functions in maintaining social harmony amid diversity at SDN 32 Muaro Putuih through the lens of structural functionalism, particularly Talcott Parsons' AGIL framework (Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency). The research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore school climate as a lived social reality experienced by school members. Data were collected through non-participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving school principals, teachers, students, parents, and community members. The validity of the data was ensured through source and time triangulation, while data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that school climate functions as a social system that fulfills AGIL requirements: (1) adaptation is reflected in inclusive practices accommodating religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity; (2) goal attainment is shown through the shared commitment to sustaining social harmony; (3) integration is achieved through mutual trust, respect, and effective communication among school members; and (4) latency (pattern maintenance) is maintained through the continuous internalization of tolerance, empathy, and social care in everyday interactions. A positive relational school climate characterized by inclusive interactions and strong school–parent communication plays a crucial role in sustaining harmony. Diversity does not lead to conflict but is managed through daily social practices grounded in shared values and supportive leadership. These findings suggest that school climate, as a socially constructed system, significantly contributes to fostering inclusive and harmonious relationships in diverse educational settings while simultaneously demonstrating the functional operation of AGIL in maintaining social order.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as an archipelagic nation characterized by extensive diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, culture, and customs. This diversity constitutes both a national identity and a valuable social asset. However, in practice, diversity does not always lead to harmonious social relations (Ufie et al., 2022). In recent years, there has been a tendency toward declining tolerance and the strengthening of exclusive mindsets, as reflected in increasing cases of intolerance such as the rejection of places of worship, closure of minority religious facilities, and discriminatory treatment toward certain religious groups (Marbun, 2023). Such conditions indicate that diversity is often perceived merely as difference without being accompanied by mutual understanding and respect, thereby increasing the potential for social conflict. If not managed wisely and sustainably, diversity may shift from being a source of social strength to a trigger of division that threatens long-term social integration (Elita et al., 2024; Tetep & Dahlena, 2024).

These challenges are also evident in the educational context. Schools, as social institutions, play a strategic role in shaping students' character and social values (Suprihatin et al., 2023; Watung et al., 2023). Ideally, schools should serve as safe, inclusive environments that uphold humanitarian values. However, schools may also become arenas of social conflict, including bullying among students. Several reported incidents of student violence in Indonesia illustrate that social harmony in schools remains a significant concern (Afrianto, 2024; Chandra Riki, 2023). Moreover, research shows that students often form friendships based on similarities in religion, background, or achievement, which may lead to exclusivity if not supported by an inclusive school climate (Anggraeni et al., 2022). Although formal education aims to encourage tolerance, its success in tackling ingrained biases is still restricted. In practice, these formal efforts are often manifested through structured initiatives such as multicultural education curricula, civic education programs promoting Pancasila values, or government-led policies like character education reinforcement programs, which tend to emphasize normative instruction rather than lived social interaction. Studies show that communities with greater trust, social connectedness and involvement in the community enhanced well-being and diminished conflict (Abdurrohman et al., 2025).

Elementary education is a crucial stage in developing not only academic competence but also social values necessary for living in a diverse society. At the age of 7–12 years, children experience critical social and moral development, where they begin to understand norms, evaluate behavior, and adapt to their social environment (Sianturi & Ndona, 2025). This phase is widely regarded as a formative period in which foundational attitudes toward diversity, empathy, and social interaction are established and internalized, making early educational experiences particularly influential in shaping long-term social behavior. Therefore, schools function as a second social environment after the family, playing a significant role in shaping students' perspectives on diversity (Saefudin, 2025). A positive school climate characterized by supportive interpersonal relationships, emotional security, and mutual respect becomes essential in fostering inclusive social interactions (Nur'am et al., 2025). Furthermore, a conducive school climate contributes to the development of inclusive social identities and promotes empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity as part of shared social life (Rahman et al., 2025).

School climate, particularly relational climate, emphasizes the quality of interactions among school members, including students, teachers, and parents. It reflects how trust, respect, and cooperation are built within daily social practices (Delgado-Galindo et al., 2025; Rathmann et al., 2018; Supriyana & Lestari, 2023). In this context, social harmony refers to a condition in which individuals coexist peacefully, uphold shared values such as tolerance and mutual respect, and maintain balanced social relationships (Prastyo, 2022; Purba et al., 2024). The development of social harmony is closely linked to values such as empathy (Mulinda et al., 2020; Saefudin, 2025), tolerance (Nurasiah et al., 2022), and social care (Sahiba & Hartati, 2022), which must be nurtured through daily interactions within the school environment.

Previous studies have explored various approaches to fostering social harmony in educational settings. For instance, multicultural education has been shown to promote inclusive and tolerant student interactions (Saihu, 2022; Sirichuenvichit & Prarokijjak, 2025). Similarly, school social capital, including shared norms and trust, plays an important role in creating harmonious school environments (Astutik, 2023). Another study highlights that harmony-based educational approaches rooted in cultural values can help students appreciate diversity as part of a collective identity (Rohayati et al., 2024; Saefudin, 2025; Yiu, 2024). While these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to focus on formal programs, policies, or instructional strategies rather than examining school climate as a lived social reality, particularly at the elementary school level (Ghafar, 2022). For example, prior research commonly evaluates the implementation of structured multicultural curricula or policy-driven interventions, but pays less attention to how everyday interactions among students, teachers, and parents organically construct a climate of harmony.

Based on these considerations, there is a research gap in understanding how school climate is constructed, experienced, and practiced in everyday school life as a means of maintaining social harmony amid diversity. This study offers an alternative perspective by analyzing school climate as a social construct shaped by daily interactions rather than merely as an outcome of formal educational programs. This perspective highlights the novelty of the study by positioning school climate not only as an institutional outcome but as a dynamic, lived experience that emerges from continuous social interaction. The chosen case, SDN 32 Muaro Putuih, presents a unique context where significant diversity in religion, ethnicity, and language exists, yet social harmony is consistently maintained. Preliminary observations and interviews indicate that no significant conflicts related to diversity have occurred, and relationships among students, teachers, and parents are characterized by mutual respect and trust.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design. Qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena in their natural settings and aims to explore, describe, and interpret meanings constructed by individuals based on their experiences and interactions (Sugiyono, 2005). This approach was chosen because the study seeks to understand the school climate as a lived social reality in maintaining social harmony amid diversity, rather than measuring variables quantitatively (Takunas et al., 2024). The research was conducted at SDN 32 Muaro Putuih, located in Tanjung Mutiara District, Agam Regency, Indonesia. The site was selected purposively due to its unique characteristics of high diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, and language, while maintaining harmonious social relations among school members. The study was carried out during the 2025–2026 academic period.

The targets of this research were the social interactions and relationships among school members that form the school climate in maintaining social harmony. The subjects of the research (informants) were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria. They included the school principal, teachers, administrative staff, students, parents, school committee members, community leaders, surrounding community members, and education stakeholders who were considered knowledgeable and involved in the school's social dynamics. The research procedure involved several stages, including preliminary observation, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation (Fadli, 2021). The researcher first conducted initial observations and interviews to identify the research focus, followed by in-depth data collection through multiple techniques. Throughout the process, the researcher acted as the main instrument, engaging directly with participants and the research setting to capture authentic social phenomena (Iba & Aditya Wardhana, 2023; Wahidmurni, 2017).

The instruments of this research included observation guidelines, interview guides, and documentation checklists. However, the primary instrument was the researcher, who played an active role in collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data. Supporting instruments were used to ensure systematic and consistent data collection. In this context, the researcher also applied

reflexivity by continuously reflecting on their positionality, background, and potential biases during the research process. Considering that the study was conducted in a socially diverse environment involving different religious and ethnic groups, the researcher was aware that their presence could influence participants' responses and interactions. Therefore, efforts were made to maintain neutrality, build trust, and create an open and respectful communication climate during interviews and observations. The researcher also minimized personal assumptions by focusing on participants' perspectives and cross-checking interpretations through triangulation to ensure objectivity and credibility of the data.

Data collection techniques consisted of observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted using a non-participant approach, allowing the researcher to observe social interactions naturally without direct involvement. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain in-depth insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding diversity and social harmony. Documentation techniques involved analyzing school records, reports, photos, and other relevant documents to support and validate the findings (Ardiansyah et al., 2023). The use of non-participant observation was intentionally chosen to minimize researcher intervention in the natural setting, especially given the sensitivity of interactions related to religious and ethnic diversity. Direct participation might have altered participants' behavior or created discomfort among certain groups. By maintaining a non-participant role, the researcher was able to capture more authentic and spontaneous social interactions. Although participant observation could potentially provide deeper immersion, this study prioritized maintaining natural social dynamics and reducing potential bias caused by the researcher's presence.

To ensure data validity, this study applied triangulation techniques, including source triangulation and time triangulation. These techniques were used to verify the consistency and credibility of data obtained from different informants and at different times (Zahroh, 2025). Data analysis techniques followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data analysis was conducted continuously throughout the research process until data saturation was achieved. This iterative process enabled the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of how school climate contributes to maintaining social harmony in a diverse environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The findings of this study indicate that the school climate at SDN 32 Muaro Putuih plays an important role in maintaining social harmony amid diversity. Although the school reflects considerable diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, language, and gender, everyday social life within the school remains harmonious. Based on the school data, religious diversity is clearly visible, with 40% of the students being Muslim, 54% Christian, and 6% Catholic. Ethnic diversity is also present, consisting of 35% Minangkabau, 60% Nias, and 5% Javanese students. In addition, linguistic diversity appears through the use of Indonesian, Minang, and Nias, while the proportion of male and female students is balanced. These data show that SDN 32 Muaro Putuih is a socially diverse educational setting, yet such diversity does not automatically lead to tension or conflict. As presented in Table 1, the diversity of the school community forms an important context for understanding how social harmony is sustained

Table 1. Diversity of SDN 32 Muaro Putuih

No.	Aspect of Diversity	Variations in School	Percentage
1	Religion	Islam	40%
		Christianity	54%
		Catholicism	6%
2	Ethnicity	Minangkabau	35%

No.	Aspect of Diversity	Variations in School	Percentage
3	Language	Nias	60%
		Javanese	5%
		Indonesian	50%
		Minang	25%
4	Gender	Nias	25%
		Male	50%
		Female	50%

The findings further reveal that harmonious social relations are maintained despite the unequal religious composition between teachers and students. The school principal is Muslim, all teachers and education staff are Muslim, while the majority of students are Christian. Data from the school show that there is one Muslim principal, 28 Muslim teachers and staff members, no Christian teachers or staff members, 128 Muslim students, and 238 Christian students distributed across 16 classes. Even with this imbalance, the relationship among members of the school community remains stable and respectful. This condition suggests that social harmony at SDN 32 Muaro Putuih is not determined by numerical equality between groups, but by the quality of social relationships and mutual understanding among school members. As shown in Table 2, the school demonstrates a unique demographic composition that nevertheless supports a peaceful school environment.

Table 2. School Condition of SDN 32 Muaro Putuih

No.	Aspect	Number of People
1	Muslim Principal	1
2	Muslim Teachers and Staff	28
3	Christian Teachers and Staff	0
4	Muslim Students	128
5	Christian Students	238
6	Classes	16

Table 2 on the condition of SDN 32 Muaro Putuih indicates that social relations within the school operate in a balanced manner despite differences in the religious composition of teachers and students. An Islamic Religious Education teacher (NA) stated that non-Muslim students are not required to participate in Islamic religious lessons. Instead, the school and parents have mutually agreed that non-Muslim students receive religious education in their respective places of worship (Interview, Monday, May 5, 2025). This practice reflects a shared understanding, mutual respect, and trust among members of the school community, fostering a tolerant school climate.

These findings are further reinforced by interviews with parents of both Muslim and Christian students. Muslim parents reported that they feel comfortable enrolling their children in SDN 32 Muaro Putuih, even within a religiously diverse school environment. One parent, identified as RS, stated that all children are treated equally at the school, with no discrimination based on religion (Interview, Monday, February 2, 2026). A similar view was expressed by another parent, MH, who noted that social interactions among students occur naturally, with children forming friendships as usual and no issues arising from religious differences (Interview, Monday, February 2, 2026).

This perspective is consistent with the views of Christian parents. One parent, identified as LM, stated that the school respects students' beliefs and does not impose religious instruction. According to LM, children receive Christian religious education in their respective places of worship (Interview, Monday, February 2, 2026). Another parent, JN, added that communication

between the school and parents is well established. They emphasized that parents feel respected and actively involved by the school (Interview, Monday, February 2, 2026). These parental perspectives indicate that the tolerant and inclusive school climate at SDN 32 Muaro Putuih is not only experienced internally by teachers and students but is also recognized by families. Relationships built on trust, openness, and respect for differences serve as a crucial foundation for maintaining social harmony in contexts of religious and socio-cultural diversity.

However, it is important to note that most of the findings are still largely based on the perspectives of teachers and parents, while the voices of students, as the main subjects of the school climate, are less represented in the qualitative data. Direct student involvement could provide deeper insights into the “lived reality” of social interactions within the school. For instance, observational vignettes during classroom and playground activities reveal how tolerance and empathy are practiced in everyday student interactions. In one observed group activity, students from different religious and ethnic backgrounds worked collaboratively without exclusion, sharing tasks and helping each other complete assignments. A student informally expressed, “We just play and study together, it doesn’t matter where we come from,” indicating a natural acceptance of diversity. Similarly, during recess, students were seen engaging in games without forming exclusive groups based on religion or ethnicity. These observations suggest that tolerance and empathy are not only conceptual values but are actively embodied in students’ daily social practices.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that school climate plays a central role in maintaining social harmony amid diversity at SDN 32 Muaro Putuih. The school, characterized by significant diversity in religion, ethnicity, and language, presents a social setting that, in many contexts, could potentially generate tension. However, the empirical evidence indicates that harmonious social relations are sustained through a positive and relational school climate, which aligns with sociological and educational theories discussed in the literature.

From the perspective of diversity, the findings confirm that diversity is not inherently a source of conflict but rather a social reality that requires proper management through mutual recognition and respect. As argued by [Marbun \(2023\)](#) and [Mandasari et al. \(2023\)](#), diversity encompasses not only differences but also the acceptance and appreciation of those differences. At SDN 32 Muaro Putuih, diversity is internalized as a shared social condition, where students interact naturally regardless of religious or ethnic backgrounds. This reflects the principle that diversity becomes socially constructive when accompanied by inclusive values and practices.

The role of school climate is particularly evident in shaping these interactions. According to [Delgado-Galindo et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Rathmann et al. \(2018\)](#), school climate includes interpersonal relationships, safety, and shared norms that influence students’ social experiences. The findings of this study show that the school provides a safe, inclusive, and emotionally supportive environment, where students feel accepted regardless of their identity. This supports the argument of [Supriyana & Lestari \(2023\)](#) that a positive school climate contributes to both effective learning and healthy social development.

More specifically, the relational dimension of school climate emerges as a key factor. The quality of relationships among students, between students and teachers, and between the school and parents reflects the relational school climate described by [Rakami et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Hickey et al. \(2026\)](#). In this case, open communication, mutual respect, and collaboration are embedded in daily interactions. These relational dynamics create a sense of belonging and trust, which are essential for preventing social fragmentation in diverse settings.

The findings also reinforce the concept of social harmony as a condition of balance, mutual respect, and shared values ([Purba et al., 2024](#); [Prastyo, 2022](#)). At SDN 32 Muaro Putuih, harmony is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of active tolerance, empathy, and social care. These values are consistently practiced in everyday school life, such as respecting religious differences in learning arrangements and maintaining equal treatment

among students. This aligns with [Ernita et al. \(2023\)](#) who emphasize that social harmony is built through solidarity and mutual understanding.

Tolerance emerges as a foundational value in sustaining this harmony. As noted by [Fitriani \(2020\)](#) and [Nurasiah et al. \(2022\)](#), tolerance involves recognizing and respecting differences in beliefs and practices. The school's policy of allowing non-Muslim students to receive religious education outside the classroom demonstrates institutional respect for diversity, which strengthens trust among stakeholders. This reflects [Rusmiati \(2023\)](#) view that tolerance is a universal value essential for peaceful coexistence.

In addition to tolerance, empathy and social care play crucial roles. The findings indicate that students develop sensitivity toward others' experiences, which fosters positive peer relationships. This is consistent with [Mulinda et al. \(2020\)](#), who argue that empathy enhances social interaction and reduces conflict. Similarly, [Sahiba & Hartati \(2022\)](#) highlight that social care, driven by moral values and emotional awareness, strengthens social bonds. At SDN 32 Muaro Putuih, these values are not formally taught as isolated concepts but are embedded in daily practices and interactions.

The study also confirms that the school functions as a social institution, not merely an academic setting. As stated by [Simanjorang \(2023\)](#) and [Nirmala Violeta \(2023\)](#), schools serve as social environments where values, norms, and behaviors are developed. The involvement of parents and the community further strengthens this social function, creating a broader network of trust and cooperation that supports harmony ([McGillicuddy & Machowska-Kosciak, 2021](#)).

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings can be explained using Talcott Parsons' structural-functionalism. The school operates as a social system that fulfills the AGIL functions ([G Ritzer, 2012](#)). First, in terms of adaptation, the school adjusts to its diverse environment by implementing inclusive practices. Second, in goal attainment, the school clearly prioritizes social harmony as part of its educational objectives. Third, integration is achieved through strong interpersonal relationships and shared norms that regulate interactions. Finally, latency (pattern maintenance) is reflected in the continuous reinforcement of tolerance, empathy, and social care through daily practices and role modeling by teachers.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with previous studies on multicultural education and social harmony. For example, [Saihu \(2022\)](#) emphasize that multicultural approaches foster inclusive and tolerant student interactions. [Astutik \(2023\)](#) highlights the role of social capital, such as trust and shared values, in building harmonious school environments. [Yiu \(2024\)](#) also demonstrates that harmony-based approaches help students perceive diversity as a collective identity rather than a source of division. However, unlike these studies, which focus on formal programs or institutional strategies, this research reveals that harmony at SDN 32 Muaro Putuih is primarily sustained through everyday social interactions and lived experiences.

This distinction underscores the study's novelty. Social harmony is not solely the result of structured interventions but emerges from the relational and cultural dynamics of the school climate. The findings suggest that when schools prioritize relationships, trust, and inclusivity, diversity can be transformed into a social asset rather than a source of conflict.

In conclusion, the discussion highlights that maintaining social harmony in a diverse school setting is deeply rooted in the quality of the school climate, particularly its relational dimension. By fostering tolerance, empathy, and social care through everyday interactions, SDN 32 Muaro Putuih demonstrates that harmonious coexistence is achievable when diversity is managed through inclusive and socially grounded practices. Furthermore, the application of Talcott Parsons' AGIL framework can be more explicitly linked to the qualitative findings of this study. For instance, the mutual agreement between the school and parents regarding religious education where non-Muslim students receive instruction in their respective places of worship reflects the function of adaptation, as the school adjusts its practices to accommodate diverse religious needs. At the same time, this agreement also strengthens integration by fostering mutual trust, shared understanding, and cooperative relationships among school members. This explicit connection between empirical findings and AGIL functions reinforces the argument that social harmony at SDN 32 Muaro Putuih is not only theoretically grounded but also practically manifested through everyday institutional and relational practices.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the school climate at SDN 32 Muaro Putuih is formed through dynamic, inclusive, and trust-based social relationships among all school members, including teachers, students, and parents. The relational dimension of the school climate plays a central role in shaping daily interactions characterized by mutual respect, openness, and effective communication. These social relations are not merely formal but are lived experiences that create a sense of safety, belonging, and emotional support within the school environment.

Furthermore, the school climate contributes significantly to maintaining social harmony amid diversity. Despite differences in religion, ethnicity, and language, the school community is able to manage diversity as a shared social reality rather than a source of conflict. This harmony is reflected in the development of tolerance, empathy, and social care among students, which are nurtured through everyday interactions, teacher role modeling, and mutual agreements between the school and parents. The absence of coercion in religious practices and the respect for each student's beliefs demonstrate the existence of an inclusive and humanistic school environment. In addition, the sustainability of social harmony in the school climate is supported by several key factors, including strong mutual trust among school members, open communication between school and parents, shared values of respect and tolerance, and consistent social practices that reinforce inclusivity. However, potential challenges remain, such as structural imbalances in religious composition and the absence of religious teachers for certain groups, which require adaptive and collaborative efforts from the school community. Overall, the study generalizes that a positive and relational school climate, grounded in everyday social practices and shared values, is a crucial factor in maintaining social harmony in a diverse elementary school context.

In terms of practical implications, this study suggests that other schools can adopt the "shared agreement" model implemented at SDN 32 Muaro Putuih, particularly in managing religious learning by involving active communication and consensus between schools and parents to ensure respect for students' diverse beliefs. Such a model can serve as a flexible and context-sensitive approach to fostering inclusivity in similarly diverse educational settings. Furthermore, this study acknowledges its limitations, especially the specific geographical and socio-cultural context of the case study, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to urban or more heterogeneous school environments. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore similar approaches in different contexts to strengthen the broader applicability of these findings.

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